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AUTHOR Connors, G. Patrick
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ABSTRACT

This guide explains the purpose of running shoes and provides tips for purchasing them. A brief explanation of the difference between training shoes and racing shoes is followed by a list of characteristics of running shoes that should be considered when buying them. These characteristics include heel fit, heel elevation and width, the inner and outer soles, and arch supports. Tips for insuring a proper fit are then provided along with a reminder to seek the advice of a specialist should problems arise. (DC)

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Hamilton Hospital BOX H / 1881 WHITE HORSE-HAMILTON SQUARE ROAD / TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08690 / PHONE (609-586-7900)
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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Marie R. Power-Barnes
Director
Public Relations & Marketing
609 586-7900 Ext. 6840

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(by: G. Patrick Connors, A.T.,C. M.Ed.)

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RUNNING SHOES

With spring just around the corner, many individuals are beginning to plan their selected sporting activities. These activities may include a jogging or competitive running program. Many participants enter a program only to find that they begin suffering from a series of nagging injuries. Some of these injuries may be prevented by spending a little more time and effort in the purchasing of equipment.

One of the most important pieces of equipment for the jogger or runner is the shoe. All shoes are constructed differently as are peoples' feet. Some shoes are made for training; others are made for racing. In addition, it is not necessarily true that the higher the shoe cost the better the shoe is for your foot type or training needs. It is important to discuss your expected activity level and foot structure (i.e. flat or high arch foot) with the salesmen to ensure that the running shoe you purchase will accommodate your needs.

The main purpose of a training shoe is to provide protection from injury; therefore the shoe should feature a thick heel wedge and solid support. This type of shoe is ideal for the casual jogger or for serious training. The racing shoe is characterized by a high degree of flexibility and its light weight. This type of shoe should not be utilized by the casual jogger or for training in lieu of conditioning. The racing shoe has a tendency to wear out fast and offer less support. In fact, many serious runners prefer to race in the training type shoe due to their injury prevention features.

The following are some characteristics one may look for when purchasing a running shoe:

A) A full, rigid heel counter to fit snugly around and cup the heel and to give it good support.
B) Heel elevation: The heel should be elevated about one-half inch higher than the front of the shoe in order to reduce the strain on the calf muscles and achilles tendon.
C) Heel width: Should measure about three inches across to allow enough stability and surface to absorb heel impact.
D) Outer sole: Should be durable, should compress and should be approximately one-half inch thick.

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E) Sole flexibility: Soles should bend easily at the ball of the foot. If they are rigid, excessive stress is placed on the back of the legs and the bottom of the foot.

F) Inner sole: The material next to the foot should be smooth, soft and non-irritating. All shoes should have inner soles.

G) Arch supports: These are usually made of sponge rubber, and actually offer little or no support. However, make sure they feel comfortable and are placed in both shoes so they don't cause blisters and/or irritation.

Check for Proper Fit:

1) Have shoes fitted after a run or at the end of the day, because your feet have a tendency to swell. Try to get service from an experienced salesperson.
2) Have shoes fitted while you are standing. If possible, try jogging on a hard surface.
3) If one foot is larger than the other, fit the larger foot.
4) Be sure to wear your regular foot attire (i.e. double socks, any padding or orthotic devices).
5) Width should be measured at the widest part of the foot.
6) Make sure that when shoes are laced, no part of the foot bulges out.
7) When trying on a pair of shoes don't simply stand and look in the mirror; take the opportunity to walk around or perhaps take a short jogging to ensure a proper fit.
8) If you use orthotic devices, remember some shoes have removeable insoles which are more appropriate for orthotic use.

The main thing to remember is that each shoe is different as are the people who wear them; so choose the shoe that best fits your foot and training needs. You should also realize that shoes are not constructed to correct foot dysfunction. The running shoe is wearing apparel and is not made to alter foot function, but support it. If you are problem free and simply need a shoe to accommodate your needs, I suggest you visit your local running

shoe store and discuss your jogging/training program with a salesman familiar with running and running shoes. If you have a problem, seek the advice of a qualified specialist. Remember, the longer you wait, the longer it takes to correct or treat a problem.

Any questions or comments should be forwarded to the Institute for Medicine in Sports, Hamilton Hospital on the Sports Medicine Information Line (609) 586-4277.

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Reference:

"How to Doctor your Feet Without the Doctor" by Miles J. Schneider, DPM and Mark D. Sussman, DPM

Special acknowledgement to : Dr. Paul Maffei, Director of Sports Medicine Podiatrics, The Institute for Medicine in Sports.